

2018

Navigating Identities in the Classroom: International Graduate Teaching Assistants' Perspectives

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NAVIGATING IDENTITIES IN THE CLASSROOM:
INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS' PERSPECTIVES

by
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B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2015

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree

Department of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2018

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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in the field of Communication Studies

Approved by:

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Graduate School
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May 17, 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Dr. Sandy P.C for your continued guidance, patience, support, and brilliance. To Dr. Bardhan for your keen eye and amazing feedback. To Dr. Toyosaki— thank you for making the university a more livable place for so many of us. To Dr. Griffin for teaching me about my whiteness as an act of love and for showcasing what it means to live critically. To Dr. Frankowski for your pedagogical excellence, for your brilliance, and for making the university a more livable place for young philosophers and students.

To international students, both my colleagues who were gracious enough to share your perspectives and experiences, and to all of you at this university and in universities all over the U.S: you are invaluable members of this community. You belong here, no matter what the national narrative says about you

DEDICATION

To my family/friends I have found in this town: Thank you for making the last six years of my life transformative and enriching.

And to my parents and nana: It is all for you, always. I hope you are smiling from the otherworld. It is an honour to make you proud.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is my first day teaching a college course as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. My body is taut with anxiety and tension. My fingers tremble nervously as 25 sets of student eyes settle on me. Earlier that morning, I had chosen my outfit carefully, weighing the implications of various fashion choices. I wanted to appear comfortable and approachable, but not too feminine. Like Adichie (2015), “I was worried about what to wear. I wanted to be taken seriously. I knew that because I was female, I would automatically have to *prove* my worth” (p. 38). I worried that being a woman would make my teaching experience more difficult. I worried that my hair, cropped short and shaved on one side, would point out my queerness. I worried that my feminism and my politics would come into the classroom with my body. I worried that my anxiety and my depression would hinder my ability to teach well. I worried that my body, marked in its various ways, would supersede my teaching—that my pedagogy would move through my body and be shaped, marked, and marred by my identities. Like Bruggemann (2001), I find that when “standing in front of a new class, each and every time, I feel the burden of representation” (p. 318-319).

Indeed, instructors’ bodies, with their various identity markers, work as “material and discursive entitie[s], integral to the learning/teaching dynamic” (Hill, 2014, p. 164). No body in the classroom is neutral. Instead, instructors’ and students’ identities are impactful to the classroom experience precisely because they are marked by the inherently political nature of the presence—and absence—of particular bodies within educational settings (Cooks & Warren, 2011).

Several of my own instructor-identities are marginalized. However, as a White,

U.S. American Graduate Teaching Assistant, my nationality, my “unaccented” use of English, and my racial identity are regarded as neutral and natural within the classroom and the academy itself. My instructional methods are guided by the tenets of critical communication pedagogy (CCP). However, they are perhaps guided *differently* because of my many privileged identities. In this project, I extend Calafell’s (2010) call to recognize “moments of pedagogical (im)possibilities” (p. 347) by centering the narratives and experiences of international graduate teaching assistants (IGTAs) to explore how the triumphs and challenges that they experience may create pedagogical im(possibilities). My work is guided by two primary research questions: 1) how do international Graduate Teaching Assistants communicate about their identities in the classroom? And 2) how am I, as a U.S. American, white instructor, able to practice critical communication pedagogy in ways that differ from international GTAs?

This project is guided by Fassett and Warren’s (2007) assertion that our relational selves are “produced in collusion and collision” (pg. 40). I understand my colleagues’ experiences as international students and scholars as relational—not separate— from my own experiences as a U.S. American student and scholar. Moreover, the IGTA’s I interviewed consistently made deliberate choices regarding their identities within the classroom. These agentic choices point to their embodiment of CCP praxis. These decisions also illuminate how CCP can be embodied by IGTAs, and how this embodiment is sometimes markedly different than my own. By perceiving these different approaches as connected, rather than separate and unrelated, I seek to explore how CCP’s tenants can work or shift for IGTAs, and how this might expand how we understand CCP praxis as a whole.

To do this, I first explore how academia in the United States has been historically exclusive to students and instructors with marginalized identities, followed by a discussion of the

commitments of Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP) as the framework for my research. I then explore the unique nature of the role that all GTAs occupy, particularly IGTAs within the context of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale's Communication Studies department. Lastly, I center the instructional experiences of two IGTAs within the department by conducting interviews to understand the ways that their identities inform their practices of critical communication pedagogy.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary to discuss the historical context of education within the United States to illuminate why the presence and absence of bodies in educational settings is deeply political. Historically, a strategic *mis*-education of African American slaves, enforced by law, made it illegal for slaves to learn to read (Douglass, 2017). Post- slavery, the eventual segregation and later, re-integration of the African American population into the U.S. American school system has resulted in many Black students experiencing marginalization and lack of support on many college campuses (Duster, 2009; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Likewise, Native American/ First Nations populations were educated through assimilation practices intended to adhere them to white cultural standards (Adams, 1995; Fox, Jo, & McClellan, 2005; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), while the Asiatic Exclusion League framed a campaign geared towards the San Francisco Board of Education to exclude Japanese and Koreans from public schools, forcing them to attend “oriental schools” (Arnold, 2011). These practices have created a politics of exclusion that have had lasting impacts for the recruitment and retention rates of many members of marginalized communities on many U.S. American campuses. It cannot be ignored that educational spaces within the United States have been strategically sanctioned for *specific* populations. Excluded and marginalized groups include women (Noltemeyer, Mujic, & Mcloughlin, 2012; Gelber, 2007); disabled students (Yssel, Pak, & Beilke, 2016; Strauss, & Sales, 2010); gay and queer students (Dilley, 2002; Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015); and African American, Asian American and Latino students (Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011).

Within the Communication Studies field, numerous scholars have explored the relational and communicative impacts of identities within the classroom. Cooks’s (2003) work considers

White students' negotiations of their racialized identities, particularly the affective impacts of their racial identities, while Simpson (2008) reminds us that white students' use of color-blind rhetoric creates "dialogue about race and racism that will remain uneven," (p. 156), noting that this rhetoric often results in students of color leaving the university or feeling unwelcome. Pensoneau-Conway and Consenza (2016) explore how discourses about disabled students limit their subject positions, advocating instead for disabled subjectivity, while Allen and Rossatto (2009) encourage us to consider how critical pedagogy creates a binary of "oppressor" and "oppressed" students, which often leads to resistance from students and persistent pedagogical struggles in the classroom. Toyosaki (2014) details similar pedagogical struggles, namely that of essentializing white students as racist, which may ultimately lead to failed dialogue between student and teacher. While not based in the field of Communication Studies, hooks is none the less influential to this line of research. Her work advocates for a holistic approach to education that attends to the well-being of students and teachers alike. Her scholarship also encourages teachers to address marginalization and privilege with an ethos of care and love (hooks, 1994). This history and body of research provides ample evidence that the bodies and identities of both students and instructors alike are decidedly political within academic spaces.

Thus, a white, queer female instructor's body is *political* in its whiteness, its queerness, and its gender within the classroom. Likewise, a Black female student's body is *political* in its Blackness and its gender within the classroom. Graduate Teaching Assistants serve as both students *and* teachers, and our identities impact both spheres of these educational experience. Moreover, if we take seriously that our bodies are artifacts of history (Yancy, 2017), we must recognize that the series of historical texts marked on our bodies necessarily impacts the classroom, and that the classroom itself is marked by historical expectations about what it means

to be “educated” (Nussbaum, 2002).

Critical Communication Pedagogy

How we communicate about our identities is also impactful within the classroom. Critical communication pedagogy (CCP) (Fassett & Warren, 2007) focuses on this phenomenon by exploring the links between language, identity, and power. CCP emerged from Sprague’s (1992) work about Instructional Communication. Sprague urged for the merging of critical pedagogy and communication theories, asserting that doing so would allow us to understand the classroom as impacted by language and prescribed ideologies that inform us about what “knowledge” is/ means, and how power functions in academia. Fassett and Warren extended Sprague’s work with CCP by developing and merging a communication theory with the aims of critical pedagogy. CCP also aligns and emerges from the critical commitments offered by Freire (1970/2000). For Freire, education has emancipatory potential when it rejects the banking model of teacher as all-knower and student as the receptacle of information, advocating instead for centering students’ lived experiences and knowledge.

Critical communication pedagogues heed these calls and understand classrooms as “sites of power” (Allen, 2011, p. 111) where language, identity, and power dynamics shape and inform each other, ultimately affecting classroom experiences for both teachers and students alike. By linking seemingly mundane classroom practices and communication to larger structures of power, CCP explores and deconstructs how communicative acts empower or disempower students and instructors while simultaneously providing a roadmap for how we might make education more emancipatory.

CCP is grounded in ten fundamental commitments deriving from a centralized goal: “to articulate a language of critique that accounts for how communication creates and makes possible our ability to see and respond to such inequalities” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 7).

These commitments allow us to understand that instances of verbal and nonverbal communicative acts in the classroom are linked to larger systems of hegemony and privilege, precisely because, “language names our reality” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 55). For example: white students’ use of a rhetoric of whiteness through tactics such as silence or color-blind rhetoric in response to students of colors’ counter- stories often works to strategically resist or deny the experiences of students of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). Likewise, Ellsworth (1989) argues that dialogue in the classroom is made difficult for students with marginalized identities who must do labor to assess power relations, the safety of the situation, and the available energy one has in each moment before engaging in dialogue. Yannuzzi and Martin (2014) also note that critical discussions are often led by students with stronger voices, and that critical dialogue in the classroom requires emotional labor from students and teachers alike.

The ability to maintain silence, or the need to strategically assess how students’ will respond to ones’ narratives, speaks to larger systems of discourses around issues of identity, power, and privilege. While “relational, responsible, and mutually empowering” (Yannuzzi & Martin, 2014, p. 718) dialogue is an aim of CCP, obtaining its liberating potential is often made difficult because of these tensions. As I will demonstrate later in this project, these tensions are particularly challenging to navigate for IGTAs.

CCP also articulates how, within the context of the classroom, the production of identity is historically ascribed to our bodies, relationally developed, and communicated. Allen (2011) reminds us that dialogue, reflexivity, and collaboration are essential for transforming educational practices by focusing on how “humans use communication to produce identity” (p. 111). For CCP and intercultural communication scholars, identity formation is not static nor does it occur outside of others— it is always relational. Moreover, Fassett and Warren (2007) remind us that

culture is *central* to our experiences, and that identity-formation is “complex, emergent, and relational” (p. 43).

Given the emergent and relational factors of identity-formation, Rowe (2005) urges us to consider a politics of relation that requires us to regard others as “inseparable, not separate, from us” (p. 27). Thus, our individual identities and self- understanding is interdependent with others. CCP illuminates the link between self and others’ identities by pointing to the potential of “(re)constituting social, cultural and economic relationships” in the classroom (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 22), ultimately moving towards the possibility of classrooms as sites of “intellectual and social emancipation” (Hay et al., 2013, p. 581).

This is no easy feat, but Spry’s (2016) notion of the Unsettled-I might help us understand this work. The Unsettled-I is polyvocal, unstable: occupying many identities at once, perpetually unsettled, *and* constructed in our relationships with others. Spry reminds us that “there is no “I” without others” (p. 80). We navigate *in* and *through* our identities with others to reconstruct and re-understand through Unsettled performances of self that emerge via communication. While performing teacher in the classroom, the notion of the Unsettled-I becomes apparent. When a student *comes out* in class, I *come out* some weeks later when deliberately donning my, “Ain’t no lie baby, I’m bi, bi, bi” t-shirt while teaching. As such, my identity as queer becomes reconstructed *and* re-understood, and takes on different meanings for different students in the classroom. I perform an unsettled self. I grapple with my students’ intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991), as well as my own, and this grappling becomes more nuanced when communicative acts de-stabilize or reconstruct our identities.

Our bodies, of course, are also impactful as instructors. Hill (2014) understands bodies as *living archives*, echoing Hall’s (1990) assertion that memories are also carried in the body— that

history comes *with* and *through* our bodies. For Anderson (2006), the body itself works as a pedagogical resource because it is marked as an historical archive of simultaneously privileged and marginalized identities and can thus serve as a site of knowledge. Anderson encourages instructors to acknowledge, rather than ignore, the impacts of instructors' bodies in the classroom. His assertion that that people with disabilities are almost always foregrounded by their bodies is taken up by Mulderink (2016), who reminds us, "The disabled body is positioned as a rich site of knowledge that the student can learn from about the nuances of power, privilege, and oppression" (p. 9). Likewise, Yancy (2017) asserts that the Blackness of a Black body precedes the body itself. Our bodies are thus marked by multiply marginalized and privileged identities and can work as sites of knowledge. An attentiveness to communicative acts about identities, paired with an investigation "of how bodies choose to represent and embody these identities" (Hill, 2014, p. 164) oftentimes becomes tantamount for the survival and success of students and instructors alike, particularly with consideration for the vast intersections of identities that many international students occupy.

Troubling Critical Communication Pedagogy

I came to learn about CCP in my first semester of working through my master's degree. I was drawn to Fassett and Warren's (2007) commitment to understanding identities, power, and the murky complexities of academia and instructing. I felt at once frustrated by this murkiness but also, suddenly, more at home in academia because these theorists were giving language to how I was experiencing teaching. With clarity and deliberateness, I took as many courses as I could that addressed CCP and identity-formation. I had found it: a body of work that was both compelling and exciting in all its possibilities.

As I moved through my courses, worked to develop my pedagogy, and had conversations

about CCP with other colleagues, I began to see the “impossibilities of (some) critical pedagogies” (Warren & Davis, 2009, p. 308). A coffee-addled conversation with one colleague was particularly insightful. He noted that, because he is both gay and a person of color, he cannot “do” CCP in the ways that I might be able to. Torres (2003) addresses this concern, asking us to consider the difficulties that emerge when those with oppressed identities are the teacher. Ellsworth (1989) also grapples with some of these difficulties, namely regarding the impossibilities of dialogue, when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against, including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and “banking education.” (p. 298)

While critical pedagogy and CCP are well-developed and researched theories, they are often used in a macrosocial context (Cooks, 2010, p. 298). Dialogues in the classroom are where many of these tensions play out. Deetz (1992) questions the emerging binary of “good” and “bad” student that arises during these dialogues. Students who are actively engaged and eager participants are read as “good,” while the more resistant students who do not engage are regarded as “bad.” Indeed, “good” students might reproduce the rhetoric that is expected of them, while resistance from “bad” students can be regarded as a problem rather than a locational starting point for transformation. Cooks (2010) argues that examinations about the power of pedagogy have not been adequately addressed. Indeed, the power to regard some students as “good” or “bad” based on their participation in in-class dialogues is indicative of the need for closer consideration of pedagogy as power-laden.

To “delve into some of the impossibilities” (Calafell, 2010) or difficulties of CCP is

particularly important regarding international Graduate Teaching Assistants. IGTAs oftentimes face *heightened* scrutiny in and around their identities as instructors and students. If we understand language as “inherently *intersubjective*; we make meaning together, we learn meaning from each other, we share meaning” (Thurlow, 2010, p. 229), then we must consider for whom this meaning-making is more difficult, marked with more tension, more silence, and more deliberation. For whom do these constraints and tensions make the practicing of CCP difficult, or even impossible? Indeed, IGTAs may be experiencing some of the differences in their identity markers between themselves and their students for the first time, and may face new concerns about how to acknowledge these differences. How does CCP praxis guide IGTAs through these tensions?

This is particularly important to consider within the context of SIUC’s Communication Studies department, for a variety of reasons. First, SIUC’s communication studies department orients itself towards an ethos of social justice and equity by focusing on identities, power, privilege, and communication in our coursework, pedagogy, and research. The nature of our department, and the courses we teach, inherently emphasizes identities and the cultural locations of students and instructors alike. As demonstrated in the following literature review and in my interviews, IGTAs may be *already*, even prior to teaching, working through identity-management that is unique to their positions as international students. It is important to consider how this impacts the instructor, and students, in the classroom.

Secondly, all GTAs in the department, including IGTAs, are in the unique position of serving as instructors of record. For some IGTAs, this means that they might be teaching for the first time in the United States. That identities and culture will inherently be centered in the course content, and encouraged by the department while IGTAs simultaneously navigate teaching, can result in experiences for IGTAs that are murky and complicated. The nature of

teaching as an IGTA results in challenging and rewarding experiences, which can illuminate the limitations and places of expansion for CCP praxis.

Graduate Teaching Assistants: Ambiguity and Emerging Expertise

The Communication Studies department at SIUC offers a week-long orientation session for Graduate Teaching Assistants. This orientation includes discussions about departmental expectations; how to address potential conflicts or difficulties that might occur with our students; meetings with an assigned peer mentor; and an introduction to the course textbook. Like most GTAs in our department, I was assigned two public speaking course sections to teach, and a week later was a course instructor for the first time in my life. My quick transition from undergraduate student to graduate student was startling, uncomfortable, and at times, exhausting.

This discomfort is a common experience among GTAs. Allen (1990) reminds us that GTAs are often uncomfortable as instructors given that many are first-year students, teaching for the first time, and have received very little training. He notes, “being new to graduate school, often new to an institution, and sometimes relatively new to an academic field is not a prescription for competence and confidence” (Allen, 1990, p. 10). The Communication Studies department has a rigorous, one-week training offers much information and insight to new GTAs. However, for many GTAs, information-gathering and insight occurs largely in the classroom, where unforeseen difficulties, dynamics, triumphs, and challenges emerge. These difficulties can heighten as Graduate Teaching Assistants also experience having their beliefs, ideas, and identities challenged during their experience as an instructor (Park, 2004).

Epstein (1974) notes that GTAs occupy one of four roles: assisting a professor with grading and other needs; laboratory assistants; a discussion section leader; or an independent teacher for introductory-level courses in English composition, international languages,

mathematics, and speech communication. The Communication Studies Department at Southern Illinois University offers the latter option to graduate students, that of *Instructor of Record*. This means that CMST 101 GTAs are responsible for teaching one or two 101 sections, grading exams, papers and speeches, holding office hours, selecting and creating course material, and submitting grades.

Vaughn (1998) notes that GTAs occupy a somewhat ambiguous niche, at the same time serving as teachers and students, employees and apprentices. Given this ambiguity, our instructional preparation is oftentimes “both a discovered and learned experience” (Park, 2004, p. 350): we learn *how* to teach as we move through the process of teaching. Chiang (2016) further elaborates on the tensions GTAs face, noting they “are graduate students and thus they are not professionals. On the other hand, they serve as instructors teaching and advising in various educational contexts, and hence they are perceived as experts by undergraduate students” (p. 114). The expectation of perceived expertise is a particularly difficult terrain to navigate, and is often a heightened tension for GTAs with marginalized identities, including those who are international GTAs and those who occupy any number of marginalized identities: women, women of color, queer women, poor women, or an intersection (Crenshaw, 1991) of many of these identity markers, for instance. For some GTAs, experiencing difficulties in navigating gender, race, and culture negatively impacts their self-worth (Park, 2004). Indeed, GTAs with marginalized identities face unique tensions in the classroom.

For some, these tensions occur even prior to teaching, and emerge during the actual GTA training itself. Fassett and Morella (2008) detail the difficulties of “coming out” as having dyslexia during GTA training. Additionally, Calafell (2010) found that during orientation, White and heterosexual graduate students were chosen to provide insight into classroom dynamics, and notes that when she attempted to try these strategies in her own classroom, they failed.

Identity differences can impact the experiences of orientation, and are always impactful within the classroom. Hill (2004) details her experiences teaching a Race and Cultural Diversity course as a queer, Black, female Teaching Assistant, recognizing that her racial and gender identity “enters as well as manifests in the classroom” (p. 164). Hill notes that *all* her identities matter in the classroom and are relationally impacted with and by her students: “the production and sedimentation of the classroom as a space, differentially marked students and myself as raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized differently and constantly made new meanings of these markings as we engaged in the course material” (p. 165). Moreover, according to Lal (2000), a GTA and a woman of color who taught at Yale University, differences across identities negatively impacted her students’ abilities to communicate *across* these differences. She notes that in her classroom:

We had not learned to see differences in power and privilege as constitutive of all social relations. Moreover, we had not acquired the ability to analyze these differences without blame and with a sense of shared responsibility. We had realized neither the collective social and political pitfalls of ignoring differences nor the potential possibilities of reconciling racial, class, and gender differences. We had not found a way to speak across our differences to find common ground. (p. 14)

For Lal, and many Graduate Teaching Instructors, our identities are relationally developed within the classroom while simultaneously impacting our ability, or *inability*, to communicate with each other. Because our teacher-identities emerge as we move through our teaching experiences, our ability to acknowledge or communicate about our identities can be made quite difficult.

CMST 101: Introduction to Oral Communication: Speech, Self, and Society

Graduate Teaching Assistants at SIUC's Communication Studies department teach sections in CMST 101: Introduction to Oral Communication: Speech, Self and Society. This is a required general education course that undergraduate students must successfully complete prior to graduation. Sellnow and Martin (2010) remind us that, "the primary goal of the basic course is to foster communication competence," (p. 44). The introduction to public speaking course encourages this communication competence by fostering students' abilities to, "write and speak with clarity, and to read and listen with comprehension" (Boyer, 1987, p. 73). Many scholars have written about what content should be included in the course. Some scholars advocate for a public speaking focus (Verberber, 1991), while others call for a focus on a diversity and multicultural communication (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 1991). Ultimately, student skills and outcomes that center on "verbal and nonverbal communication, public speaking, listening, interpersonal (one-on-one) and small group (team-based) communication, diversity critical thinking, and communication apprehension" (Sellnow & Marin, 2010, p. 39) are the primary aims of the course.

For several years within our department, we drew from Warren and Fassett's (2015) *Communication: A Critical/Cultural Introduction* for several years to situate communication and public speaking within a culturally diverse context. One of my interviewees has taught from this textbook, and so I note its content here because it shaped her pedagogical approaches. Additionally, both of my interviewees took a required course, Communication Studies at the University Level, that provided an analysis and practice of instructional methods related to teaching CMST 101. In both sections, the instructor drew from texts that included discussions about CCP. As such, both of my interviewees have been introduced to CCP's framework.

The Warren and Fassett (2015) textbook encourages students to consider the link between

communication and power; compassionate critical listening; identity and perception; political “correctness”; language and culture; groups and alliances in culture; and interpersonal relationships and culture. The content of the textbook, paired with the department’s focus on social justice, equity, and an attentiveness to structural equality and inequality necessitates an attentiveness to instructors’ and students’ identities. As such, classroom conversations often involve discussions about power, privilege, and communication. For example, I encouraged my students to develop critical media literacy skills by asking them to consider *who* is represented within media and *how* they are represented. These conversations are often fraught with tension, resistance, and discovery.

The department has recently begun using Ross and Leonard’s (2012) *Introduction to the Speechmaking Process* textbook. This text is less critically-oriented than Warren and Fassett’s (2015). However, it does encourage students to consider the impacts of language, demographics, and audience members’ value orientations when constructing and presenting their speeches. These topics of discussion inherently invite students to consider how their identities, their peers’ identities, and their instructor’s identities will impact the content of their speeches. Sometimes the students bring this content into the classroom themselves: recent events spark critical conversations, as do students’ self- chosen speech topics. Instructors also use the introduction to oral communication workbook. The content of the workbook is written and published by our own GTAs, and includes more critical approaches to public speaking. Moreover, the very nature of CMST 101 encourages criticality among students and instructors alike, and conversations about identities, power, and politics often emerge.

Navigating this terrain can be difficult and tenuous for new GTAs, particularly those who have never taught before. This is also true for IGTAs. Feelings of discomfort or lack of confidence might lead GTAs to avoid such topics, or to unsuccessfully navigate them. Moreover,

an emphasis on identities may negatively impact students' evaluations of their instructors (Lal, 2000). Many new GTAs must balance the weight of addressing identities in the classroom while simultaneously learning *how* to teach. Our perceived expertise, paired with these tensions, can negatively impact how we engage with identities in the classroom.

International Graduate Teaching Assistants (IGTAs)

International Graduate Teaching Assistants have unique experiences at U.S. American campuses. IGTAs are both students *and* TAs, and so I explore how their unique location impacts both positions. Before detailing the difficulties that international students experience on U.S. American campuses, I would like to highlight what some of these students bring to universities. Appel-Schumacher (2015) describes international students as *global nomads*. She reminds us that international students “bring significant understanding of other cultures, languages, and historical events.... they are internal agents of changes, and they contribute to increased intercultural competences” (p. 27). This reframing of international students as global nomads encourages U.S American institutions to view this student population as both valuable and integral to the success of the university, particularly if the university goals align with a commitment to diversity and encouraging students to be global citizens. Rajani and Groutsis (2018) also note that the “cultural knowledge and career capital” (p. 137) developed via their experiences as international students is vital for future career successes. The relationship between international students and the university is thus reciprocally beneficial: the university welcomes international students who are global nomads, while international students can cultivate career capital in the form of developing new cultural knowledge and experiences.

Despite this reciprocal relationship, this student population faces a myriad of unique and often difficult experiences while studying in the United States. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West

(2015) note that international students are migrants and (typically) ethnic minorities that are expected to adjust quickly to a new culture; they face higher demands regarding their academic performance, they have unique issues regarding temporary visas; and they must adjust to having a lack of contact with family and friends while in the states. Notably, 61.5% of these students finance their education using either personal or family funds (Institute of International Exchange, 2007). Olivas and Li (2006) detail numerous adjustments, including navigating cultural differences, language challenges, and the U.S. educational system as well as homesickness, financial difficulties, and health issues (p. 218). Psychological difficulties experienced by international students in the U.S. include depression, relationship difficulties, and anxiety (Mesidor & Sly, 2014), but only 17% of this student population seeks mental health support (Lee, 2014). Crockett and Hays (2011) found that overall, international students tend to seek out counseling assistance less than U.S. American students. Cultural norms are impactful here: collectivist values impact students' choices to rely on family and friends for support (Lee, 2014), while Byon et al.'s (1999) research found that Korean international students prefer a counseling experience like that of a classroom experience, with the counselor as the authority figure.

Cultural adjustments among international students include trends of acculturation, assimilation, or separation. Acculturation is the cultural and psychological changes that groups and individuals undergo in developing a behavioral repertoire when adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2005). International students often navigate the tensions of acculturation through a process of assimilation or separation. Singaravelu and Pope (2007) note that international students sometimes work to assimilate into the host culture as a means of being accepted. Alternatively, some international students will adopt a separation strategy, in which they develop relationships primarily with other students from their own cultural group as a means of remaining connected to their cultural identity and to obtain social support (Singaravelu & Pope, 2007).

Additionally, international students often face tensions regarding their identities. Many international students feel that they occupy a liminal cultural space and begin to question where they belong. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) describe this as *neither/nor world* and discuss the phenomenon of Third Culture Kids (TCKs). TCKs move between their home and their host locations, and build “relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 13). It is important to mark that this is not an experience that *all* international students have. Some international students are very clear that their origin location is their home, and that they will return to it. Others feel more complicated, murky relationships to *both* cultural locations, and develop a shifting understanding of their own identities as a result (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Rodricks, 2012).

As instructors of record within the Communication Studies department, IGTAs cannot separate these difficulties from the experiences they have in the classroom. In fact, the classroom itself often works to heighten these tensions. Issues of language, “accented” talk, and the use of nonstandard English are also areas of adjustment and tensions for IGTAs. Tsuda (2008) reminds us that English hegemony results in *linguicide* (the killing of languages); the spread of U.S. American culture through the “replacement of languages” (p. 253); the control of information; and colonization of the mind. Many IGTAs consistently face tensions with English hegemony. For IGTAs whose first language is not English, they must read, write, and teach in their second or third known language. Bailey (1983) understands this as a “foreign TA problem” in which misunderstandings and miscommunications around language and cultural differences occur between students and IGTAs. Issues with IGTAs credibility and capabilities emerge, resulting in students questioning their instructor’s abilities to teach.

Race oftentimes becomes a new dynamic for IGTAs. Bardhan and Zhang (2017) found that international students “feel the daily pressure to make sense of and perform race in ways that

do not seem natural to them but are considered natural all around them” (p. 300). Rodricks’s (2012) narrative of being read as a Spanish-speaking Latino works here as a primary example of this phenomenon. Rodricks, a self-identified gay, Catholic, Prorogues- Indian, first generation Third Culture Kid from India, grappled with the experience of being misread and mis-identified as Latino. This is a common experience for international students and IGTAs, and a unique position to be in.

Oftentimes, IGTAs do not have the cultural context to understand their racial identity as situated within the United States. This can/does result in them being misread or misidentified. As an instructor, this lack of context and potential for misidentification can cause confusion or tension between instructors and students. This is a unique tightrope to walk, particularly within a department that encourages conversations about identity politics within the classroom. For new IGTAs, the ability to have these conversations can be fraught with tension. Goldenburg (2014) asserts that teachers are never culture-less (or race-less), noting that “our identities alter how we engage in our pedagogical practices” (p. 121). This can be uniquely difficult for IGTAs. While they are working to conceptualize their newly expanded “cultural lenses,” they are simultaneously grappling with their emerging understanding of their identities. I question how IGTAs can align their pedagogical practices with the commitments of critical communication pedagogy. Is CCP a plausible and possible practice of pedagogical engagement for IGTAs?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND FINDINGS

Method

To explore the research questions, 1) how do international Graduate Teaching Assistants communicate about their identities in the classroom? And 2) how am I, as a U.S. American, white instructor, able to practice critical communication pedagogy in ways that differ from international GTAs, I developed 10 interview questions (**See Appendix A**). These questions center around three primary themes: 1) the difficulties IGTAAs experience as international instructors of record, 2) how they communicate about their identities in the classroom, if at all, and 3) the impacts of their communication about their identities in the classroom. I conducted face-to-face (FtF) interviews with two graduate students in the department. I received Human Subjects approval from Southern Illinois University on March 21st, 2018 to conduct these interviews. These FtF were informant interviews conducted with colleagues “who have knowledge of a cultural scene” (Opdenakker, 2006, p. 3)—in this case: knowledge about being an IGTA. Because I am colleagues and friends with these interview participants, some of the questions in the interviews refer to previous conversations we have had prior to the interviews.

I contacted both interviewees in-person, and both agreed to be interviewed. I interviewed Sujay on March 25th, 2018 at his home and Cherry in our shared office space on March 31st. Sujay is a first-year Master’s student from Pune, India. Cherry is a second-year PhD student from Kunming, China. I recorded their responses on my phone. The files were then transferred to my laptop, uploaded to the free website otranscribe.com, and then transcribed. I listened to each recording three times to ensure correct transcriptions.

To find themes in my participants’ responses, I used the *meaning condensation* (Kvale, 2007) method. This analysis involves five steps: reading the completed interview; determining

meaning units (words or phrases that describe a phenomenon) within the texts; restating the overarching theme of meaning units as simply as possible; interrogating the meaning in terms of the study; and tying together important themes from the interview into a descriptive statement (Kvale, 2007). I uncovered natural units and central themes in each interview, then contrasted the found themes in each individual interview across both interviews to find patterns in the responses. Several emerging themes were found, including discussions about cultural differences in educational practices; linguistic differences; concerns about establishing credibility; uncertainty; fitting in/ making oneself compatible; the nature of the course impacting discussions about identities; and identity differences. Both participants also described methods of support that have worked for them in the department, and offered suggestions for areas of improvement. These responses are discussed in a later section of this project.

Cultural Differences in Educational Practices

Both Cherry and Sujay described differences in educational practices in the United States. Sujay noted that instructional methods in the United States tend to be student-centric, but in India, they are teacher-centric: “in Indian classrooms, the most important person is the teacher. In American classrooms, the most important person is the student.” He explained that, while teaching in India, he “had a different mindset all together,” noting, “I think any teacher like once you start teaching, uh, probably most of the times the reference of teaching that you have is of your own teachers. The way you were taught. And if you like that style of teaching you try and replicate the same way of teaching your students.” I perceive that Sujay’s eight years of teaching in India involved him taking up and reproducing his learned practices of student teacher behavior. I, too, have done the same thing in my own pedagogical practices. As such, he likely developed instructional patterns that mirrored his previous instructors’ patterns, and these appear to be more teacher-centric in nature. Sujay’s transition to the United States seems to involve him

having to re-adjust and become more comfortable with student-centered pedagogical practices.

Perhaps the tension here is related to the distinction between high-power and low-power distance cultural views. Roach, Cornett-Devito, and Devito (2005) remind us that with a high-power distant culture, the educational process is typically teacher-centric, wherein “teachers control the intellectual program and tend to initiate and control communication” (p. 89). In low-power distance cultures, the educational process and expectations are different. This tends to be a more student-centric dynamic, and emphasis is placed on student initiative and independence. Students are encouraged to ask questions of instructors, or disagree with their perspectives or opinions (Roach, Cornett- Devito & Devito, 2005). It is important to note that each person within each cultural location will have different and unique expectations of student/teacher behavior—not every person in every culture behaves in the same manner. However, cultural impacts permeate individual behavior and can thus not be ignored.

Cherry also detailed similar experiences, noting that undergraduate education in the United States is “totally different.” Cherry notes that U.S. American students do not want to be challenged by different pedagogical practices, and are instead invested in maintaining the status quo. Poignantly, she asserts, “They do not want to be challenged by a different style, instead they probably think this new style is inadequate. Is not correct, is not the way it’s supposed to be.” This resistance might be perceived as authoritarianism. Bresnahan & Min Sun (1993) remind us that authoritarianism is an “uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Outside interference poses a threat to maintenance of existing lifestyles, particularly when values which conflict with the status quo are introduced” (p. 6). Their research indicates that U.S. American students with authoritarian leanings actively avoid classes taught by IGTAAs, and preferred that graduate schools be reserved exclusively to Americans (Bresnahan & Min Sun, 1993). For Cherry, this

perceived resistance caused her to feel uneasy and uncomfortable.

Both Sujay and Cherry's responses to cultural differences in educational practices harken back to Fassett and Warren's (2007) reminder that culture is central to CCP, not additive, noting that "the location of culture is anything but apolitical" (p. 43). Sujay and Cherry's cultural locations impact what can oftentimes be regarded as neutral or normal pedagogical practices (providing or not providing rubrics for an assignment, for example). However, my interviewees illuminate that these differences are deeply impactful and can result in instructors' uncertainty and students' resistance.

Much of Fassett and Warren's (2007) work draws heavily on the ideological, political, and power-laden nature of culture in the classroom. Indeed, pedagogically different practices *can* be included within these factors, and as Cherry argues, they do. If some students perceive these differences as deficiencies and if these differences negatively impact how instructors feel while they teach—in Cherry's case, uncomfortable and uneasy—is it possible to bridge these tensions through CCP practices?

Linguistic Differences

A possible answer to this question might be uncovered while looking at Sujay and Cherry's responses to linguistic differences in the classroom. Both IGTAAs noted that accent-differences were impactful in the classroom. As Alcoff (1991) reminds us, "how what is said gets heard depends on who says it" (13). Interestingly, both colleagues took different routes to address these differences, and have received different responses to their accents. Cherry notes that her accent may be perceived as linguistic inadequacy, an inadequacy that she believes creates distrust, evaluation, and/or judgement from some of her students,

During the first probably four or five weeks, students were kind of like

distance from me. And then...because I could feel that kind of like, questioning of my ability of teaching, and then. I intentionally brought the copy about my, uh, linguistic differences from one of my application materials. It's kind of like my, um, statement of purpose when I applied...used to apply to SIU PhD program here. And then, I asked students to kind of like each read one sentence from it. And then they were really into it, and then they figured out that I could write so well. And then also, they knew that I definitely am able to teach.

There are quite a few points of discussion worth detailing about Cherry's experiences.

First, He and Lee (2009) remind us that China is estimated as having the world's largest English-learning population. Yet, Cherry had to *prove* her English proficiency by bringing in a document from her *PhD application* into the classroom. Sekimoto's (2014) research about dis/orienting experiences for international persons is useful in understanding this experience:

For privileged subjects, the world hails them as mobile subjects of the world who are worthy and welcome. In contrast, individuals or groups without unearned privilege struggle to navigate multiple social spaces and institutions, often dealing with unspoken rules and barriers. Marginalized subjects experience the world as closed in, with multiple checkpoints that stop them from moving freely (Young, 2003). They are subjected to the world that hails them as unworthy and unwelcome. They experience the unevenness of the world by being denied access to the world socially, physically, or spatially (Fassett, 2010). (p. 385)

Cherry's experiences with linguistic difference is an example of a checkpoint, a hailing that signals she is perhaps perceived by some of her students as unwelcome because of her accented

talk. This materializes in her students' bodily response to her— distrust, questioning, distance. However, once Cherry “proved” her English- writing abilities, their affective and bodily responses to Cherry shifted: “I could really feel certain kind of connections. I mean, the changes from their look, their eyes, and their...even their attitude in talking with me. It's a little bit different.” Cherry perceives that she was initially— for four to five weeks— denied the possibility that she might be able to teach because of her accented talk, but upon providing proof of her abilities, she becomes “upright” again and regarded as an effective teacher.

Yet, Cherry continues to receive comments about her accented-English. These comments appear on student quizzes: “They would say, okay, people from different culture speak very, like uh, light English. I could. I would interpret it as like easy or simple English.” In an office meeting with another student, the student insists that her other instructor from India is “‘the worst because I cannot understand his, his. Oh.’ She stopped. I know she was about to say ‘accent’.” For Cherry, this linguistic difference checkpoint continues to emerge and remerge, although it takes different forms in different situations. These can also be understood as microaggressions that may indicate students might consider her a “failed expert” or a “fraud” (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011).

Sujay's experience with U.S. American accents is important here, too: “there's nothing called as standard American accent. Like, people come in the classroom from all over the places. So, even, even they have different accents and I find it difficult sometimes to understand what they are trying to say.” This is a reminder that IGTAs are often regarded as linguistic others. Importantly, Sujay reminds us that U.S. American students are not without accents, and that he himself must adjust to *them*. This disrupts the common response to IGTAs— that *they* are the person with accented talk in the room— and encourages us to consider what a standard U.S.

American accent is.

Both Sujay and Cherry took different routes in responding to accented talk. Sujay addressed his accent on the first day of class:

Right in the first lecture, I tell them this. That two things are going to be difficult. That I'm definitely going to have a strong influence of mother-tongue on my accent. So, I'm going to speak with this accent and there's possibility that you may not understand few things.

This approach aligns with other IGTA's methods, including Mutua (2014), an instructor from Kenya, who addresses both her accent and her home origin during the first day of teaching, noting, "This usually introduces some levity to the discussion and gets most students engaged, and drives the point home that English has different dialects" (p. 55). Perhaps this level of engagement about accented-talk was similarly productively addressed by Sujay, who asserts that he has not received any complaints about his accented talk from his students. The difference in responses is interesting: Cherry is met with outright resistance, but eventually disrupted this resistance by "proving" her English proficiency. Sujay, on the other hand, addressed his accent on the first day of class, and has been met with no further comments about the accented difference.

Identity freezing (Cupach & Imahori, 1993) is perhaps at play here. Identity freezing occurs one's identity is "frozen" to a stereotype or cultural identity. In response to identity freezing, facework strategies are employed. By providing an initial, immediate acknowledgement about his accented-talk, Sujay deploys preventative facework, an approach that prepares one for a loss of our own face or the face of others. Corrective facework, on the other hand, involves the use of strategies that repair a scene and restore face after it is either been lost or threatened (Cupach & Imahori, 1993). By addressing her accent later in the semester, *and*

by providing “proof” of her English proficiency, Cherry deployed a corrective facework strategy. However, her students’ continued comments about accented talk on quizzes and in conversations indicate that this strategy may not have been effective, and that Cherry may continue to face linguistic checkpoints in her interactions with her students.

These different approaches and responses remind us that language, and analysis of language as constitutive of social phenomena, is central to critical communication pedagogy (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 48). The English language comes with cultural capital, namely because it is widely regarded as the “natural” and “preferred” way of communicating. Both Cherry and Sujay have obtained said cultural capital, but are still met with resistance due to their accents. Whether they are aware of it or not, both instructors employ different facework strategies to maintain their credibility as instructors, which has been a main concern for both as they establish their teacher- identities.

Establishing Credibility

For Sujay and Cherry, establishing credibility as instructors has been impactful to their experiences in the classroom. This concern might be related to their perceived expert power as instructors. McCroskey and Richmond (1983) note that *expert power* is students’ beliefs about how competent, qualified, and knowledgeable instructors are. For Cherry, this was an immediate concern:

At the very first semester, when I started teaching, I was not very, very familiar with the field, with the field, and all the kind of like, ah, subject matter we are talking about as a scholar. So I didn't really...I was still struggling with how to effectively build my own credibility instead of like, ah, caring about my content or my strategies.

Cherry was worried about the impacts of having only some expert power about her field. Once

finding her footing as a communication studies scholar, she stated that she began talking about her identities in the classroom, “especially with linguistic identities.” Establishing expert power allowed her to feel more comfortable discussing her identities in the classroom. Alternatively, Sujay’s concerns about credibility are more specific to discussions about race

I am, as an outsider, who is neither white, nor black, nor Hispanic...uh...who’s an outsider, who’s a foreigner, for me it is necessary to be neutral. Like. Walk on the edge. That I have to keep in mind that whatever views I’m presenting in the class, I’m not biased.

As a self-described cultural outsider, Sujay believes that he cannot express a firm stance about race because he simply has no context for how race works in the United States. Moreover, he does not fall into the racial categories that are often centered in conversations about race in the United States, namely Blackness. Because he simultaneously lacks context and is a racialized Other, Sujay “walks on the edge” of conversations about race. Another international scholar, Sekimoto (2015) notes, “The longer I stay in the United States, the greater and more forceful the gravity of racialization becomes” (p. 392). Sujay’s self-described “identity crisis” might be an emergent response to this emergent experience of racialization, and impacts his ability to engage in conversations about race while teaching.

Uncertainty

Both Cherry and Sujay expressed experiencing uncertainty as instructors. Some of these experiences are perhaps directly related to identity differences in the classroom. For Cherry, this uncertainty took several forms, particularly regarding her students’ physical responses to her,

Sometimes I just-a feel, uh, students have those kind of like, looks. Like a distrust. And questioning. Sometimes even kind of like, uh, um evaluating or judging. It’s kind of like staring at me while I was talking.

Andersen (1979) notes that nonverbal immediacy may be expressed by instructors and students via nonverbal communication, including nods, smiling, eye gaze, smiles, body posture, forward leans, gestures, and appropriate touch. These immediacy cues heighten sensory stimulation between individuals and decrease physical and psychological distances (Anderson). Cherry's interview response does not directly address her students' nonverbal immediacy cues, but *does* suggest a lack of warm reception in the form of some of these cues, which may hint at perhaps some existing physical and psychological distance between herself and her students.

For Cherry, these nonverbal immediacy responses seemed to be initially missing in her experience with her students, causing her to feel uncertainty. However, these immediacy responses begin to emerge after Cherry acknowledges her linguistic differences by bringing in documents from her PhD application. Cherry's description that there were "changes from their look, their eyes, and their...even their attitude in talking with me" indicate that addressing her linguistic differences resulted in the emergence of these immediacy cues from her students, and perhaps a closing of some of the possibly existing physical and psychological distance.

Concerns about uncertainty for Sujay were more evident around his new role as a GTA, primarily understanding the rules and regulations regarding the position,

One thing for sure, that is, rules and regulations. Is something...oh. It's too much to remember. You know? And uh, sometimes I feel pressurized.

Sometimes I'm like...am I breaking any rules by saying this in a class, am I breaking any rule by responding to a particular situation like this, am I doing it right? So. I'm always skeptical.

Sujay also expressed the desire for an authority figure, namely a boss, to be transparent with him if rules are being broken. For Sujay, ambiguity regarding rules and regulations seems to create deep uncertainty in his experience as an IGTA. This is discussed later in my project in the section about

supporting IGTAAs.

Fitting In

Both participants' uncertainty also appears to be related to their processes of attempting to become more compatible with, or fitting into, the university as an instructor and a student.

While all GTAs experience similar transition periods in adapting to our new roles as student/teacher/researcher/community member, my interviewees each detailed unique experiences. Sujay described the process of fitting in and adapting as an enriching process:

You grow as a person and you grow as a teacher. Like, to a different level all together. You learn how to be compassionate towards other people, especially towards people who have completely different cultural contexts. Who have a particular way of doing things. which probably, you know, you never did those things in that particular way. So. Making yourself compatible. First, understanding them and then taking actions accordingly.

This process of establishing compatibility involves understanding his students and then taking appropriate actions. During this process, Sujay has experienced a sense of personal growth.

Cherry, on the other hand, understands fitting in as an essential means of maintaining recognition. "You have to kind of like, um, adjust yourself. Fit yourself into this new environment entirely. Otherwise, you know, other people or students just won't, um, recognize you." Similarly, Mutua (2014) writes that as an IGTA, cultural changes emerged from *her* and not the other way around, "I have had to undo years of cultural learning regarding who a student and teacher is, and how that relationship should be handled" (p. 58). This "undoing" works as a set of strategic practices and action-taking that may be a continuing process for both Sujay and Cherry that works as a method of adjusting.

Discussions About Identities

Much of the content of the two interviews illuminated to me that both Sujay and Cherry are near-constantly engaging in identity-negotiations in the classroom. Discussions about identities are, as I suggested earlier in this project, also made more salient given the course content. Sujay noted,

In public speaking, that is inevitable I think. At some point, you have to discuss the identity markers and how you're going to be perceived based on your looks because the first thing that...that...probably people observe before you start speaking is the way you look. So maybe your race, your physique, your body, your gender. So yes, I...many times not intentionally, but discussions unfold in such a way that the...these things definitely come in the picture.

For Sujay, his instructor-body works as a text through which his identities are read and perceived, a text that he believes must be acknowledged because it already *is*, even prior to our speaking. Similarly, Sekimoto and Brown (2016) understand our social and ideological experiences as “materially and bodily grounded, making the body a contested site, not only of symbolic representations, but also of material manifestations and embodiments of power” (p. 118). Sujay’s awareness of his body and its identity-markers encourages, perhaps even necessitates, that he addresses some of his identities in the classroom. Moreover, in his experiences, in-class discussions have often invariably led to conversations about identities. These conversations, he notes, do not happen intentionally. This indicates that regardless of the textbook being used in the class, Sujay naturally experiences conversations about identity-politics as he teaches the course.

Cherry, as mentioned earlier, began discussing her identities more explicitly once she felt

she had established her credibility as an instructor in the field. However, the content of the course textbook guided her discussions more explicitly about identities, “it kind of created so many opportunities to talk about the differences. Um. So I kind of like used lots of, um, um, class time to incorporate the examples from other cultures, not only from China.”

Cherry’s discussions about identities were shaped by two factors: 1) her perceived credibility in the field and 2) the content of the textbook. Much research has been conducted about the quality and content of communication textbooks, including Hugenberg’s (1996) claim that public speaking instruction requires students to become Westernized, while Treinen and Warren’s (2001) work advocating that the basic course requires an antiracist pedagogy to address its patterns of either exoticizing differences or outright ignoring it. The combination of a textbook that directly addresses differences *and* our understanding of international students as cultural nomads (Appel-Schumacher, 2015) might help address these arguably missing components of a public speaking course. As IGTA instructors, both Cherry and Sujay bring with them their own cultural performances. This illuminates to students that public speaking, in the form of teaching, can and does look differently for international instructors. This, paired with course content that encourages students to reconsider how students understand difference, can foster students’ ability to reconstruct how they view public speaking *and* IGTA’s. A prime example of this is when Cherry addressed her linguistic differences, and many students began to respond more openly to her.

Identity Differences

Both IGTA’s grapple with their identities— how to talk about them; when to talk about them; how to respond to students; navigating having a lack of context; how to address resistance. Cherry poignantly reminds us that *difference is not deficiency*:

There is not only one accent there. There's not only one way of expressing themselves. Or like, ah, communicating. So, I just, a, think you know we need

to address the difference by not using our own standards to evaluate people. Cherry also advocates for moving from using the phrase “people of color” (POC) to “people of different color” instead. She argues that the use of the term POC encourages white individuals to consider themselves non-racialized. Cherry asserts that a more nuanced language is required to address the complexities of racialized bodies and experiences, noting that *all* people are racialized, and the language of “people of color” does not address these complexities.

For Sujay, identity difference between himself and his students have encouraged a reconstruction of how he understands his identities. “People who were born and brought up in U.S. irrespective of their race or gender or other things, I think, they know their identities better than me. So, probably like, I’m rediscovering my identity.” Sujay’s perception that his students know their identities better than he knows his own identity assumes that their identity-formation has become static, and presupposes that identity-formation is not relational or communicative. However, Sujay *himself* might be impacting how students understand their own identities, and the conversations that develop in the classroom might also encourage identity-shifting in his students.

Keating’s (1996) work about threshold identities is useful here. She reminds us that relational connections are possible despite difference, noting that threshold identities can involve the intentional movement between worlds to create new connections among apparently different people. Moreover, threshold identities encourage agentic movements guided by identity differences. An agentic, integrated understanding of these identities might serve Sujay to connect with his students. Sujay can work to recognize students’ more well-established identity understandings while simultaneously attempting to find connections between his students’ identities and his own. As an example, he could consider how anti-blackness plays out in India or

illuminate the connections between caste differences in India and racial differences in the United States. While Sujay's understanding about his identities are changing, he also occupies a unique place wherein he can move between developing a Western context added with his pre-existing Indian context. This can prove powerful and impactful in his pedagogical approaches. If Sujay begins to view differences as possible sites of linkage and connection, his tenure as an IGTA can be positively impacted.

Supporting IGTAs

Both Sujay and Cherry offered suggestions for how, as IGTAs, they would like to receive support. Sujay noted that the required CMST 539 course (Communication Studies at the University Level) was extremely helpful in helping him navigate his teacher- identity. This course provides students with a space to express how they are experiencing the classroom, and allows colleagues to offer feedback and advice. It serves as a communal experience that helps new instructors feel less isolated as they move through their first semester teaching at SIUC. In his second semester of teaching, he has found himself missing the support that he experienced while in the course.

Sujay also noted that he feels overwhelmed by the rules and regulations and would like more transparency and direct support in this regard. "If my boss ensures me that, you know, see as long as whatever you're doing is...is... the motive...the motive behind your actions is right, then I'll take care of the rules." I perceive that he is uncomfortable with the lack of consistent oversight and is concerned about the possibility of unintentionally breaking rules. This might also be compounded by the need to meet department expectations in terms of turning in paperwork and deadlines, of which there are many. The nature of a GTA position encourages a self-driven, individual-centric approach to these tasks. It can feel, at times, as if one is supposed to inherently know how to approach certain rules or new experiences as a teacher. As a new

IGTA in the department, Sujay might be uncomfortable asking for help and seeks an authoritative figure to assist him more directly.

Cherry also described similar experiences, namely around asking for help. “I was educated in a very kind of like um, traditional way by my parents. I, they really teach me, or taught me not to bother people if you can solve the things, the problem yourself.” Her upbringing, paired with being the only international student admitted in her cohort, caused her initial hesitation in sharing her experiences. “I couldn't share my difficulties with anybody because they don't have the same thing. And then, if I share, and then they could probably, could not understand, and then it could even marginalize me or my experience even further.” However, as Cherry has moved through the program, she has worked to share her experiences with colleagues more freely and this has helped her “figure things out.” She also noted that when new colleagues arrived, she took time to talk with them to share perspectives and experiences, particularly when other colleagues became depressed, because she “knew this was something they needed.”

In her time here, Cherry has been able to move from the perceived cultural expectation that one should figure things out on their own to a more holistic approach that encourages conversations with, and supporting of, colleagues. Moreover, she has taken up a role of advice-giving to new members of the department. Rodricks' (2012) discussion about empowerment is applicable here. He details his transition from entrapment to empowerment as a Third Culture Kid, noting “I could either succumb, or do something” (p. 98). While this was no easy task for Rodricks, nor for Cherry, I perceive that her ability to cultivate agency and empowerment has been vital in her success and perseverance as a graduate student.

Cherry also made suggestions regarding the mentor-mentee pairing that our department

offers. Mentors are chosen by the basic course director to pair up with incoming members of the new cohort and work with their mentees throughout the semester to help support them. Cherry noted that this is an excellent idea, but could be strengthened,

I think we should have some kind of like, ah, initial meeting or talks with each other. And then if they feel they have that rapport, and then, yeah. They probably could kind of like pick each other after they come in this program for, like a, like a few weeks. Instead of like assign prior to their coming.

Her rationale behind this suggestion stems from her observations that power-dynamics might impact the mentor-mentee relationship, noting that the support intervention is sometimes ineffective in this way. Lastly, she suggested workshops that provide new GTAs with information about instructional practices, such as how to create a rubric and how to successfully structure class time. This would be useful for all GTAs, but perhaps particularly helpful for IGTAAs that have experienced different pedagogical practices in their own school.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Conclusion: IGTAs and CCP Praxis

Because the public speaking course in our department encourages conversations about power, identity, and civic engagement, it arguably sets the stage for CCP praxis. In addressing my initial research question—Is CCP a plausible and possible practice of pedagogical engagement for IGTAs?—I have found that both Cherry and Sujay have adapted unique strategies that work for them as instructors. Their approaches to CCP praxis are driven largely by Fassett and Warren’s (2007) assertion that culture is central, not additive (p. 42), and that concrete and mundane communication practices are constitutive of larger social structural systems (p. 43). As such, I perceive that *their CCP praxis is largely guided by their identities as IGTAs*.

For instance, Sujay’s hesitancy regarding talking about race in his course emerges from his new identity as an IGTA. As a cultural outsider who does not fit into the Black- white binary of conversations about race, Sujay practices neutrality regarding the subject of race when it is discussed in the classroom. Likewise, cultural differences regarding pedagogical practices inform both Cherry and Sujay’s concerns about how to lead classes in a U.S. American context. Cherry reminds us that these are not neutral concerns, and that students’ resistance is a product of larger desires to maintain the status-quo— to resist being challenged by different pedagogical practices. Notably, Cherry perceived that she needed to establish her credibility as a communication scholar before discussing her identities in the classroom. Moreover, to establish that she can be a successful public speaking instructor, she had to also establish and prove her English speaking and writing proficiency. Both Sujay and Cherry’s accented-linguistic differences require unique and specific communicative acts in the classroom, and for Sujay, his understanding of his

identities has begun to shift because of his instructor-identity. Moreover, his perception about pedagogical practices has also begun to shift:

I have started taking my teaching way too seriously that what I did in those 8.5 years. Because in those eight and a half years, the primary intention behind my teaching was to earn money. But after coming here, it's about pedagogy as well. It's about how you... it's about doing some reflexive thinking about your own teaching, and making improvements lecture by lecture.

This emerging understanding regarding instructor-practices is, again, informed by Sujay's identities as an international instructor. His new perspective about reflexivity and placing primacy on pedagogical practices are informed by his transition to the U.S. American teaching context.

As a U.S. American GTA, my identities do not impact my CCP practices as explicitly. However, this is precisely what Fassett and Warren (2007) mean when they assert that concrete, mundane communication practices are constitutive of larger social structure systems (p. 43). As a white instructor, for example, I can lead conversations about race without being regarded as "having an agenda" because I am not a person of color. However, like both Sujay and Cherry, I consistently address my identity-markers that might be regarded as a "problem" in the classroom (gender, mental health). These choices emerge out of a large sociopolitical context, *and* in my relationship to IGTA's. Rather than viewing their experiences as instructors as fundamentally different than my own, critical communication pedagogy encourages me to consider what ways our experiences overlap, are similar, and are impacted by our differences. This allows me to consider how I might approach my CCP praxis differently than my IGTA colleagues and friends and to look for similarities in our approaches, despite our different identities.

As I conducted the interviews with my colleagues, it became clear to me that some of the

CCP tenants are particularly impactful to these IGTAs. Commitment two notes that critical communication educators understand power as fluid and complex (Fassett and Warren's, 2007, p. 41). Examples provided in the Fassett and Warren text illustrate how instructors have power, and encourage us to trouble how we understand our power and privilege as instructors. My colleagues' interviews, however, illuminated the unique complications of being IGTAs in the classroom, and how this negatively impacts students' perceptions about their abilities and heightened their uncertainty as instructors. For these IGTAs, power is certainly complex—and fluid in the sense that students' resistance may have emerged from resistance to cultural differences. Indeed, IGTAs may not always have power in the classroom, and this reflects larger structures that are U.S.-centric in nature. A deeper exploration of how IGTAs understand and experience power in the classroom might further illuminate these complications.

Fassett and Warren (2007) also assert that culture is central to critical communication pedagogy, not additive (p. 42). Their examples draw largely on students' resistance to course material that centers “too much culture stuff” (p. 42). This is a reoccurring kind of resistance I and many colleagues have experienced from students, and points to a larger belief that classroom spaces should be apolitical and neutral. The IGTA's I interviewed, however, experience culture differently in the classroom. They bring culture in the classroom with their accents, their cultural references, and their educational practices that might be different from U.S. American practices. Cherry's reminder that differences are not deficiencies points to experiences that she had around her different identity markers, while my own experiences with my identities being regarded as normative and neutral point to perceived lack of differences. Thus, for these IGTAs, culture is indeed central—and perhaps even more central to the ways that they experience the classroom than U.S. American GTAs.

Lastly, Fasset and Warren (2007) remind us that critical communication educators engage dialogue as both metaphor and method for our relationship with others (p. 54). Dialogue requires mutual inquiry in order to (de)construct ideologies, identities, and cultures (p. 55). Numerous scholars have done work regarding the (im)possibilities of dialogue within the classroom (Ellsworth, 1989; Simpson, 2008). My interviews illuminated the unique tensions IGTAs face around dialogue in the classroom. Sujay's perception about having to remain neutral in the classroom regarding discussions about race is a prime example of these tensions. Moreover, Cherry's concerns regarding establishing credibility before engaging in conversations about identity politics also point to these difficulties. I perceive that *all* GTAs experience tension in the classroom when identity politics are discussed. However, my interviews illuminate that these IGTAs move more carefully and deliberately into these discussions. Further research should explore how IGTAs experience dialogue in the classroom.

In writing this project, I have found remarkably little research about IGTAs use of CCP praxis. This is alarming to me, particularly considering the many unique intersection of identities that IGTAs have. CCP researchers have made claims that "instructors will always have more power than their students" (Bohr, 2011, p. 16), or that the aim of CCP praxis is to "work toward considered deliberation on and dialogue with the material experiences of the marginalized in order to engage in praxis" (Fassett, 2016, p. 128). These assertions do not address the ways that IGTAs experience power in the classroom, or how IGTAs with marginalized identities might embody CCP praxis. Indeed, IGTAs deploy unique strategies that emerge from their identities. If these practices are guided by CCP tenants, their perspectives, voices, and pedagogical approaches can prove useful to include in this body of research. As global nomads (Appel-Schumacher, 2015), IGTAs bring invaluable insight, practice, experience, and perspective to U.S.

American classrooms. Yet, much research about their experiences centers on only the difficulties that they experience, rather than the strategic methods they deploy in classroom settings to bring their global knowledge to the classroom. I encourage critical communication pedagogues and researchers who are not international students or scholars to consider their own praxis in relation to IGTAs, and for further research about CCP to include the experiences and practices that IGTAs use in the classroom.

Limitations

This project is a pilot-study that includes interviews with a very small number of participants. A much larger number of interviews would serve to make this research more in-depth. Additionally, follow-up interviews with participants would prove useful in gauging how these IGTAs have continued to navigate the instructor-identities and CCP praxis as they move their teaching. Lastly, a broader data set that contrasts IGTAs as critical communication pedagogues across multiple communication studies departments might provide information about how the context and content of the introductory public speaking course impacts IGTAs CCP practices

Comparing Experiences

It is my first day teaching a college course as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. My body is taut with anxiety and tension. My fingers tremble nervously as 25 sets of student eyes settle on me. When I enter the classroom, my white- racial identity does not proceed me (Yancy, 2017), and in this way, my body is marked as neutral. My first and only language is English, and is regarded as accent-less. I am therefore able to by-pass any conversation about accents. Because all my educational experiences have occurred within the context of the United States, I have an inherent sense of how I am expected to lead my classroom sessions, and this lessens my anxiety.

As I move through the semester, and conversations about identity-differences emerge, I have a well-established cultural context. I can address these topics with relative ease and fluidness. I can be assertive about how I understand the impacts of race, for example, because I have 32 years of cultural context. The only times when I *need* to explicitly address one of my identity markers, my gender, is in response to students' reoccurring sexist comments. Because I am straight-passing, my students are not resistant to my sexual orientation. Again: conversations around this identity-marker occur only when I *choose* to come out to the class to strategically support some of my queer students.

As an instructor with diagnosed severe depressive disorder and social anxiety, I question my authority as a public speaking instructor. In the two years that I have taught the course, I have never believed that I should be. My anxiety hinders my ability to be a strong public speaker. How can I encourage students' strong public speaking habits when I cannot, in most contexts, be regarded as a strong public speaker? I feel very much like fraud and am uncertain about how I obtained this instructor-position. Like Sujay and Chery, I question my instructor credibility, which increases my uncertainty in the classroom.

Like Sujay and Cherry, I make choices around addressing my identities as a teacher. During every semester, I construct a speech about my experiences with anxiety and depression and present it to the class. I want to encourage their empathy, and let my students with anxiety and depression know that I also share similar experiences. When I come out to my students, I do so to offer up a queer-wink to my LGBTQI family-members who are also my students. However, unlike Sujay and Cherry, I largely disclose my identities *when* and *how* I want to. Disparaging comments about my gender are the only time when I am pushed to talk about my identity-markers. Because my identities are largely regarded as normative and neutral, my identity-

markers become less salient than my IGTA colleagues as I establish and practice my pedagogical approaches.

Both Cherry and Sujay, however, make choices about their pedagogy that are more emergent from their identities as IGTAs. Because of Sujay's self-described "identity crisis," as he learns to navigate the U.S. American education system, he makes choices about how and when to communicate about his identities. Likewise, Cherry struggled initially with cultural expectations from her students about how the classroom should function. Moreover, her desire to develop her expertise as a new communication studies scholar led her to discuss her identities in the classroom at a slower rate. Both IGTAs have made strategic choices to address their accented talk and cultural differences in the classroom. These choices point to the complications of IGTAs as critical communication pedagogues, but also point to the emerging possibilities of navigating differences in the classroom as IGTAs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

01. Where are you from?
02. How long have you lived in the U.S?
03. How long have you been an instructor/ GTA for SIUC?
04. What courses have you taught in the past? What courses do you currently teach?
05. As an international GTA, what are some difficulties you face in the classrooms that you believe GTA's from the United States may not face?
06. Do you discuss any of your identities (race, ethnicity, gender, class/caste, ability, etc) while teaching? Why or why not?
07. If you have discussed your identities, what are the impacts that these discussions have had on the dynamics of the classroom?
08. How do students respond to you as an international GTA?
09. Are there unique challenges you have experienced while teaching at SIU? How do you address these challenges?
10. What kinds of support have you received as an international GTA? What kinds of support do you believe would be helpful?
11. What do you want others to know about the experience of being an international GTA teaching at SIUC?

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Research Paper Title:
Navigating Identities in the Classroom: International Graduate Teaching Assistants' Perspectives

Major Professor: Sandra Pensoneau-Conway